

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Mount Sinai Baptist Church

other names/site number Mount Sinai Baptist Church and Cemetery  
DHR Number 133-5249

**2. Location**

street & 6100 Holy Neck Road ☐ not for publication  
number \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Suffolk (independent city) ☐ vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Suffolk code 800 Zip 23437

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

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**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public—local  
☐ public—state  
☐ public—Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- ☒ building (s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/AName of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: Religious facility  
FUNERARY Cemetery

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: Religious facility  
FUNERARY Cemetery

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)Late Victorian: Gothic**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation BRICK  
Roof ASPHALT  
Walls BRICK  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X   A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- X   C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- X   A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

  ARCHITECTURE  

  RELIGION  

  ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black  

**Period of Significance**   1881-1956  

**Significant Dates**   1881—purchase of lot for erection of the church    
  circa 1920—construction of the cemetery    
  1921—erection of the present church  

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

  N/A  

**Cultural Affiliation**   N/A  

**Architect/Builder**   Richard H. Riedel—architect  

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

  X   State Historic Preservation Office.  
      Other State agency  
      Federal agency  
      Local government  
      University  
      Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property**   3.0  

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>  18  </u>	<u> 336455 </u>	<u> 4056193 </u>	2	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>
	<u>      </u> See continuation sheet.						

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title:   Kimble A. David, Architectural Historian   date:   6/2/2006  

street & number   P O Box 7638   telephone   757/623-3456  

city or town:   Norfolk   state:   VA   zip code:   23509  

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name   Mount Sinai Baptist Church Treasurers  

street & number   6100 Holy Neck Road   telephone   757 / 657-6212  

city or town   Suffolk   state   VA   zip code   23437  

=====  
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Mount Sinai Baptist Church  
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Summary Architectural Description:

Mount Sinai Baptist Church is a Victorian Gothic Revival church with associated cemetery. The church building is situated on the north side of Holy Neck Road and the cemetery is situated on the south side of the road opposite the church. The church is located within the city of Suffolk near the village of Holland in the rural part of the city. The church building is constructed of brick and was designed by a local village of Holland architect, Richard Herman Riedel (1865-1954). The building was constructed in 1921 by members of the church who were brick masons. The church is designed in the Victorian Gothic style with a two towered façade and prominent Classical porch. The building has pointed Gothic-arched windows of stained glass imported from Germany. The building has two additions to the rear (north) dating to 1964 and 2000. The cemetery associated with the church dates circa 1920 and has a rectangular plan. Markers are comprised of concrete slab tombs and plain stone markers exhibiting vernacular inscriptions. The Mount Sinai Baptist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with African American history in the city of Suffolk, the former Nansemond County, Criterion C for its architectural style and integrity, and under Criterion Exception A for its religious function from the period 1881 to 1956, and continuing today.

Architectural Description:

Mount Sinai Baptist Church is situated on the north side of Holy Neck Road. The cemetery associated with the church is located on the south side of the roadway opposite the church. The area is rural and comprises agricultural properties.

Mount Sinai Baptist Church is a Victorian Gothic Revival-style church building constructed of brick in 1921. The church features two prominent towers flanking the entrance, which is sheltered by a Classical porch. The towers are of different heights and have different tops. The west tower features a crenellated parapet and the east tower is topped with an octagonal roof atop a hipped roof. The building is topped by a side-gable roof clad in asphalt shingles. There is an intersecting gable between the towers on the façade. The gables feature modillion raking cornices and cornices. The east and west elevation gables are closed with modillion cornices and raking cornices with wide friezes. Within the end gables there is a Gothic-arched louvered vent and diamond medallions. The east and west elevations have three bays with a central oversized Gothic arch window flanked by four light-windows surmounted by a Gothic-arched window. Between the Gothic arch windows and four-light windows there is a recessed parged panel. The building features a parged watertable and has stone articulation on the towers, Gothic arches and within the gables.

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The east tower is two-stories with louvered belfry. There is a Gothic arch stained glass window on the façade and a tripartite window on the east elevation. A single-leaf door is situated on the west elevation accessing the porch. The west tower has three fixed stained glass windows on the south and west elevations below the crenellated parapet. There are stained glass windows on the south and west elevations. The south elevation window has a Gothic arch form and the west elevation has a rectangular stained glass window. There is a single-leaf door accessing the porch on the east elevation of the tower.

The façade porch has a hipped roof with wood modillion cornice supported by four Corinthian columns constructed of metal. The porch is surmounted by a Gothic arch window with Gothic arch tracery and a louvered vent. Within the porch there is a double-leaf wood door surmounted by a stained glass transom. The transom contains the name of the church misspelled, "Mt Sinia Church," formed by individual stained glass lights.

The interior of the main building features an open sanctuary with balcony along the south façade and a separate balcony situated at the northwest corner. The south balcony is supported by plain wood posts with wood rolling doors between each post. The doors were manufacture by J. G. Wilson, Co of South Norfolk, Virginia. The northwest balcony is supported by plain columns. The balconies feature plain balustrades with recessed wood panels. The south balcony surmounts the vestibule, which features double-leaf doors accessing the sanctuary. The balcony is accessed by doors leading from the porch. The small rooms flanking the balcony originally served as classrooms that could be separated from the main sanctuary by the rolling doors, but presently are used for sanctuary seating. The sanctuary is an open space with plastered walls and a timbered ceiling with a recessed octagonal central ornament. The light fixtures have Gothic motifs and have pendant forms. The windows within the church echo the exterior fenestration pattern. The stained glass windows are double-hung wood sash and were manufactured in Germany according to congregation members. The pews were added in 1943. The flooring of the sanctuary is sloped toward the pulpit and has been carpeted in wall-to-wall carpet. The pulpit is stepped with original hand carved furniture. It is framed in a wide and low-pitched jack arch. There is a baptismal pool to the south of the pulpit added in the 1964 addition. It is poured concrete with water spickets on the west end. The pool is accessed by a single-leaf door in the west antechamber. The pulpit area is paneled in modern wood paneling. Flanking the pulpit are two single-leaf door openings to the chambers and north area of the building. Surmounting the door frames are blank Gothic arch windows.

Flanking the pulpit are two antechambers. The chamber on the northwest corner accesses the balcony in the northwest corner of the sanctuary with a narrow stair. Below the stair is a stair accessing the

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basement level. The southwest chamber is an open office space. The flooring within the chambers has been carpeted. There are doors leading from the north wall to the original ell and education additions made to the north.

An original one-story ell is appended to the north elevation of the building it has been partially encased in a circa 1964 addition. The basement story housed an original kitchen and dining room added in 1939. The dining room is situated within the one-story ell and the kitchen is situated under the main sanctuary at the northwest corner. The flooring is concrete slab and the walls have been parged. Original window openings mark the north wall and are filled with wood casement windows. The dining room is currently used as storage and the kitchen is used as a utility room. The addition encompassing the original one-story ell is two-stories with a flat roof. The 1964 addition features a double-leaf entrance on the east elevation near the entrance to the basement story. There is a similar entrance on the west elevation. The windows have paired three-light metal framed forms with operable lights. The interior features modern classroom and office space with wall-to-wall carpet and vinyl tile flooring and wallboard walls. The ceilings are suspended.

An addition was made to the building in 2000 at the north end. This portion is linked to the earlier addition by an interior hallway. The addition is wood frame clad in brick veneer topped by a gable roof clad in asphalt shingles. The windows are 8/8 vinyl double-hung sash. The rooms within this addition feature wall-to-wall carpet flooring. The walls are clad in wallboard and the ceilings are suspended. There is a larger meeting space in the center of the building with kitchen.

The cemetery is situated south of the church. It has a rectangular plan. There is no fencing surround the cemetery denoting its boundaries. There are presently 758 burials within the cemetery. Within the cemetery there are family plots surrounded by low brick walls. The cemetery was begun circa 1920 and markers date from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the present day. The forms of markers vary. There are some headstones and footstone as well as flat concrete tombs. Inscriptions on the markers also vary from carved inscription to inscription written on the wet concrete by hand. There is a cenotaph located at the northwest corner dedicated to Reverend Israel Cross, founder of Mount Sinai Baptist Church. It is a stone obelisk with an inscription.

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Summary Statement of Significance:

Mount Sinai Baptist Church was founded in 1867 when Reverend Israel Cross, a former slave, encouraged the African American members of the Reedy Branch Baptist Church congregation to form their own church. The congregation worshiped in a log building until erecting a frame church in 1871.

The Mount Sinai Baptist Church congregation purchased an acre of land in 1881 erecting a frame church, which was replaced in 1921 by the current church. The church is an example of Victorian Gothic Revival architecture in a rural setting, and is a rare example of this architectural form in the rural areas of current city of Suffolk, formerly Nansemond County. The congregation added a cemetery to the south of the church circa 1920, which is in continual use. Mount Sinai Baptist Church continues to serve as an African American religious institution within the city of Suffolk. The Mount Sinai Baptist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with African American history in the city of Suffolk, the former Nansemond County, Criterion C for its architectural style and integrity and under Criterion Exception A for its religious function from the period 1881 to 1956, and continuing today.

Statement of Significance:

A group of African American congregates, which became the Mount Sinai Baptist Church congregation, was formed before the Civil War and its congregation first worship in a bush arbor on the grounds of the Reedy Branch Baptist Church in South Quay, Virginia in Nansemond County. They then moved from the grounds of Reedy Branch Baptist Church and constructed a bush arbor on the Dempsey Hare farm. After a disagreement among the members, Benjamin Howell, told the congregation he would donate a piece of land for the construction of a church. The congregation moved to this site erecting another bush arbor and used logs for pews. They soon afterward constructed a log building on the site and used it as their third place of worship. They purchased a parcel of land in 1881 from Benjamin Howell and erected a frame church. The cemetery was added circa 1920. The current church replaced the earlier frame church in 1921 with additions dating to 1964 and 2000.

**Early Years of the Congregation of Mount Sinai Baptist Church**

In 1867 Reverend Israel Cross founded Mount Sinai Baptist Church when he came to the log building on Benjamin Howell land. In 1868 he encouraged the African American members of the Reedy Branch Baptist Church to join Mount Sinai Baptist Church so they could organize their own church and erect a more permanent building. In 1871, the congregation replaced the log church with a wood



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frame building. The construction of the church was executed by Thomas Drake and Isaiah Harrell, members of this church. After thirteen years at this church, the congregation had outgrown the frame building. They acquired an acre of land from Benjamin Howell on Holy Neck Road in 1881 and relocated to this site.<sup>1</sup>

**Reverend Israel Cross and His Impact to Mount Sinai Baptist Church and the Surrounding Area**

The founding of the Mount Sinai Baptist Church congregation is attributed to Reverend Israel Cross. Cross was a former slave born in 1832 in the Holy Neck area where the present Mount Sinai Baptist Church is located. He was reared on the Dillard Plantation and his father, David Porter, was the overseer for the plantation and worked for a man named Cross.<sup>2</sup> Israel Cross learned to read and write while he was a slave. The white children of his master taught him from their lessons they learned each day. Prior to the Civil War, Reverend Jones, a white minister gave Cross access to his library and encouraged him after the Civil War to preach. Israel Cross took the name Cross versus Porter after he was freed in the Post-Civil War period in honor of his father's overseer. It has been alleged that he felt that he regarded himself as a superior African American and that he perceived himself an example of an educated African American to be emulated. In addition to his rudimentary education in the antebellum period, he attended the Old Richmond Theological Institute in Richmond. It is noted that he walked one hundred miles from Nansemond County to Richmond with his trunk upon his back to attend the Institute. He only attended the Institute for a short period of time leaving after a dispute over the interpretation of a scripture.<sup>3</sup> Cross is noted as forming the Mount Sinai Baptist Church and the Piney Grove Baptist Church in Nansemond County. He came to own a large estate, which was deeded to his children after his death.<sup>4</sup> During his sermons he promoted land ownership among the African American congregation. There were and are numerous African American land owners in the vicinity of the church, which is attributed to Cross. In addition to his ecclesiastical work, he also promoted education of African American school children during the Reconstruction era in Nansemond County. It is noted that he donated lands for the construction of schools and bargained with the county to gain more classroom space in schools by having the African American community erect the buildings if the county would provide a teacher. He preached at both Mount Sinai and Piney Grove Baptist Churches until his death in 1911.<sup>5</sup>

**History of Mount Sinai Baptist Church on Its Current Site**

Lands were purchased from Mr. Benjamin Howell for the construction of a new church building in 1881. Approximately one acre of land was deeded for payment of \$5.00. The stipulation was written

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that the lands remain for use as a church. The trustees of the church were Preston Hunter, P. Cross, Charles Dillard, Cornelius Mellen, Benjamin Howell, Matthew Bailey and Peter Darcun.<sup>6</sup> The church was constructed by Mr. J. P. Butler. The debt for erecting the church was paid in 1886. This building was remodeled in 1908 and in 1911. The current building was constructed in 1921 and cost \$30,000.00 to erect. A building committee was formed in 1918 to raise funds and obtain an architect for the construction of the new church. By 1919, the committee had selected local architect, Richard Herman Riedel (1865-1954) and had acquired initial funding for the erection of the church. The church continued to raise money to pay off the debt of the church's construction and by December 1941, the mortgage was finally paid. A burning committee was appointed for a ceremony to mark the milestone.<sup>7</sup>

In October 1943 a baptismal pool was erected to the north (rear) of the church for members' baptisms. Prior to the construction of the pool, members were baptized in a nearby stream. The pews for the church were ordered from Hickory Desk Company in November 1943 replacing earlier wood pews. Additional improvements included the purchase of an organ for the choir stand in May 1950. An annex was begun to the north of the original church on November 6, 1963. The administration of the annex's construction was conducted by Frank L. Walden and the Trustees of the church. Walden was the general contractor for the project. The erection of the annex was comprised of donated labor of sixty-four members of the church. A note of \$4000.00 was acquired for the erection of the annex in excess of the \$2628.36 contributed by the church members for the construction. In 1966 the annex was completed. The annex included the baptismal pool located at the back of the choir stand, replacing the 1943 outdoor pool. An additional annex was made to the north of the first annex in 2000.

**Richard Herman Riedel (1865-1954), Architect of Mount Sinai Baptist Church**

The building was designed by Mr. Richard Herman Riedel, who was a local building designer living in Holland, Virginia, a small village within the City of Suffolk. Numerous members of the church were brick masons in the area and directly assisted with the building's construction.

Richard Herman Riedel (1865-1954) was born in Germany on February 25, 1865. He immigrated to the United States at the age of eighteen with a group of Germans. Riedel settled in Nansemond County, present day city of Suffolk, near the village of Holland. He was employed as a mechanic on the farm of Zachariah Everett Holland, a land owner in the vicinity of the village of Holland. He learned the building trade during his employment with Holland and became a builder-architect who was responsible for designing numerous buildings within and surrounding the village of Holland. He designed the Holland Christian Church, where he was a member and also served on its Board of

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Deacons. He married in 1888 and had six children. In 1914 he served on the town of Holland Board of Supervisors. After his wife's death in 1949 he relocated to Emporia, Virginia to live with one of his sons. He remained in Emporia until his death on May 15, 1954. He is buried in the Holland Cemetery next to his wife.<sup>8</sup>

**Victorian Gothic Revival Church Architecture and Influences to the Mount Sinai Baptist Church**

The church exhibits characteristics of Victorian Gothic Revival architecture with its Gothic and Classical forms. The Victorian Gothic Revival style achieved prominence in the United States in the 1870s, but was adapted and used through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It employs characteristics of the Victorian styles and Gothic styles forming a hybrid of highly ornate church forms. This building employs characteristics of the Victorian style though not the highly ornate polychromed and Victorian details typical of the style. It employs the Classical motifs on its portico and on its cornices and raking cornices. The proportion of the building is a typical Classical or Colonial Revival form with Gothic articulation. The Gothic Revival is emphasized on the towers and on the windows.

This church was erected in 1921, which is a late date for a Victorian Gothic Revival designed church. Unlike numerous ecclesiastical buildings erected in rural areas of the former Nansemond County, present day city of Suffolk, this building was constructed of brick versus wood, which was readily accessible in Nansemond County. The style exhibits more high-style features of ecclesiastical architecture in a rural setting. The higher style is more typical of urban churches found within towns and cities in the surrounding former Nansemond County. The execution of the building in brick was due to the large number of brick masons that were members of the church who directly participated in the church's construction.

During the Pre-World War II period numerous eclectic revivals were popularized for church design. The period between 1880 and 1940 drew from numerous architectural sources, including the Gothic, Victorian, Baroque, Classical, Beaux Arts, and Romanesque. These churches reflect the styles of their predecessors, but have adapted them in many cases with more of a modern style found during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These ecclesiastical designs use earlier sources in conjunction with modern materials and styles of the period. In some cases, architects drew from earlier precedents and made an effort to replicate an earlier style in a truer manner of the style. In addition, these buildings tend to reflect the culture of the congregation linking the congregation to their ancestral home.<sup>9</sup> While architecture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century adapted styles for use within new building forms, ecclesiastical architecture of this period primarily drew from historical sources. In the case of Gothic Revival

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architecture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Gothic Revival was thought to exemplify church architecture of the medieval period and reflect a “spiritual revival” of society and the congregation. It was during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that numerous edifices in the Gothic Revival style were erected harkening to the Gothic churches of Europe.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the reuse of the Gothic architecture in what is termed as the Gothic Revival style. Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages originated and was primarily used in church design. The Gothic Revival style became prominent in ecclesiastical design, though some adaptations to other functions were seen in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Parliament Building (1836) in England deviated from the traditional church form employing the English Gothic style for use in a government facility. The Late Gothic Revival style employed similar ideas and its use was widespread and became most popular in the Collegiate Gothic style at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. The style was also employed for skyscrapers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including the Woolworth Building (1913) in New York and Tribune Tower (1923-1925) in Chicago.<sup>10</sup> Most architects employed the Gothic Revival style for church buildings, seeing it as the appropriate style of church architecture since its roots were ecclesiastical.<sup>11</sup>

The use of the timbering in the ceiling of Mount Sinai Baptist Church is rooted in the vaulting of churches from the Gothic period of ecclesiastical building. The vault ribs were most popular in a cross rib form of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, churches in Germany began to multiply the vault ribs and incorporate patterns within the vault ribs. In addition, the vault ribs took on geometrical designs within the arches. This form of vault ribbing was most popular during the Late Gothic period in Germany and is considered the “Golden Age” of German ecclesiastical architecture executed in the Gothic style.<sup>12</sup> Within the Mount Sinai Baptist Church ceiling, the Gothic arch ribbing is replaced with a timbered ceiling with a geometric pattern. The center of the ceiling comprises a concave, octagonal recession that emphasizes the geometric pattern of the ceiling timbers. Unlike a more pure geometric pattern, the ceiling of Mount Sinai Baptist Church adapted this form in a stylized variation of the vault ribbing.

Among rural churches within Nansemond County, most were erected of wood with a simplified form. The buildings served the congregation and were inexpensive to erect due to the vast amount of available timber in the rural county. As church congregations grew, many of the earlier frame buildings were replaced with either larger frame buildings or buildings executed in brick. The modest vernacular churches were replaced with more ornate buildings or buildings erected of brick reflecting the prosperity of the church and its members.

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The use of masonry within the Mount Sinai Baptist Church reflects the prestige of the congregation as members of a craft versus a congregation that drew from the predominant agricultural properties surrounding the church. The church's execution in brick gives it more a permanent presence than churches executed in wood. The use of brick and the higher style of architecture made it one of the finer buildings of the community. The use of permanent materials and high ornamentation also is linked to the ideology of the union of church and its members. With unity, the church reinforces its strength within the community and among the members of the church.<sup>13</sup>

The erection of the new church building served two functions for the congregation. It served as a larger space to house the growing congregation and to exhibit the wealth of the congregation. The church symbolizes the collective success of the congregation and the progress made by the congregation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building reflects the two important features of the congregation, the building as the symbol of the community. This form serves the purposes of reflecting the pattern of continuity and pattern of change and success.<sup>14</sup>

**African American Church Congregations and Their Influence to the African American Community**

The church was the center of African American life during the Reconstruction era. The earliest African American churches in Nansemond County were of the Baptist and Methodist faiths. At first, churches for African Americans were required to have a white pastor, who was installed to lead the congregation, but also to ensure that the congregation was not incited to violence or rebellion against slavery. In the period after the Civil War, churches were able to have African American pastors and became more autonomous.

Religion was important to the African-American community before the Civil War, but due to suspicions of African Americans congregating amongst themselves, many white churches served both the white and African American congregations. Within southeastern Virginia and throughout Virginia, the reaction of the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831 in the adjacent Southampton County set into motion the creation of laws in Virginia restricting the congregating of African Americans for fear of reprisals in reaction to slavery.<sup>15</sup> The races were separated within the church building during the church service. There were African American congregations that had formed prior to the Civil War and congregated within their own church buildings, but these are primarily found within the urban centers in Virginia.<sup>16</sup> After the Civil War, many African American congregations separated from their white churches forming their own congregations. In the years immediately post Civil War, numerous African American congregations were formed within Nansemond County and pastors and reverends

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took charge of creating and encouraging congregations of African Americans.

During the Reconstruction era African American reverends and pastors served to assist in the advancement of public services as well as serving as a mentor and motivator for its congregation. Numerous public schools founded in the Reconstruction era were a direct result of pressure by African American congregations and their leaders to provide education for African American school children. In addition, reverends, such as Israel Cross encouraged his congregation to purchase land and to promote education. Reverends that followed Cross at Mount Sinai became politically active during the period of integration and establishing equal rights during the 1950s and 1960s. The church during these periods served as a political and religious institution for the benefit of its members. The impact of the role of the church brought strength to the local African American community and congregation.

The church is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Place under Criterion A for its association with African American history in the city of Suffolk, the former Nansemond County, Criterion C for its Victorian Gothic Revival style and architectural integrity and Criterion Exception A for its religious function during the period 1881-1956, and continuing today.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries of the Mount Sinai Baptist Church include the parcels owned by the church denoted as 50-86 and 50-86T within the City of Suffolk Real Estate Assessment Office records.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries include the parcels historically associated with the church and the current boundaries of church-owned lands. The boundaries reflect the function of the church and significance of the church outlined in this submission.

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Digital Photograph List

The following is the same for all the photos that accompany this submission.

Mount Sinai Baptist Church, #133-5249

Suffolk (independent city), Virginia

Photos Taken by Kimble A. David

Date Taken: 26 March 2006

Digital Photographs are stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond

1. Cemetery—looking SW
2. Photograph Number 1

1. SE oblique
2. Photograph Number 2

1. SE oblique
2. Photograph Number 3

1. SW oblique
2. Photograph Number 4

1. Sanctuary—looking east
2. Photograph Number 5

1. Antechamber—looking SE
2. Photograph Number 6

1. Sanctuary—looking SE
2. Photograph Number 7

1. Sanctuary—looking SW
2. Photograph Number 8

1. Sanctuary—looking south
2. Photograph Number 9

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1. Antechamber—looking west
2. Photograph Number 10
  
1. Sanctuary—looking west
2. Photograph Number 11
  
1. Sanctuary—looking north
2. Photograph Number 12
  
1. Sanctuary—looking north
2. Photograph Number 13
  
1. Sanctuary—looking NE
2. Photograph Number 14
  
1. Sanctuary—looking NE
2. Photograph Number 15
  
1. Sanctuary—looking NW
2. Photograph Number 16
  
1. Sanctuary—looking NW
2. Photograph Number 17
  
1. 2000 Addition—meeting space—looking north
2. Photograph Number 18
  
1. 1964 Addition—hall—looking north to 2000 Addition
2. Photograph Number 19
  
1. Basement—looking west
2. Photograph Number 20
  
1. NE oblique
2. Photograph Number 21

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1. NW oblique
2. Photograph Number 22
  
1. West elevation
2. Photograph Number 23
  
1. West elevation
2. Photograph Number 24
  
1. Cemetery—looking SW
2. Photograph Number 25
  
1. Cemetery—tomb detail
2. Photograph Number 26
  
1. Cemetery—Reverend Israel Cross cenotaph
2. Photograph Number 27

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Endnotes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Data compiled by the church in their publications listed under the authorship of Mount Sinai Baptist Church.
- <sup>2</sup> Garnett, William Edward and Ellison, John Malcus, "Negro Life in Rural Virginia, 1865-1934," Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station, (Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia. Bulletin 295, 1934), 35.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 35-36.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>5</sup> Lowe, Elgin, "Black Churches and Businesses: The Suffolk Area Then and Now," (Suffolk, Virginia, by author, 1992), 53.
- <sup>6</sup> Nansemond County Deed Book 9, page 639.
- <sup>7</sup> Data compiled by the church.
- <sup>8</sup> Data compiled by the church.
- <sup>9</sup> Howe, Jeffery, "Houses of Worship: An Identification Guide to the History and Styles of American Religious Architecture," (San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press, 2003), 247.
- <sup>10</sup> Whiffen, Marcus, "American Architecture since 1780: A guide to the styles," (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), 173-177.
- <sup>11</sup> Sturgis, Russell, et al, "Sturgis' Illustrated Dictionary of Architecture and Building: An unabridged reprint of the 1901-2 Edition: Volume II: F-N," (Minneola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1989), 281-284.
- <sup>12</sup> Nussbaum, Norbert, "German Gothic Architecture," (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 180.
- <sup>13</sup> Glassie, Henry, "Vernacular Architecture," (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 90.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 70.
- <sup>15</sup> Mitchell, Henry H., "Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years," (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 57.
- <sup>16</sup> Loth, Calder Ed., "Virginia Landmarks of Black History," (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 2-3.